

NEW YORK WORLD-
TELEGRAM AND SUN

MAR 23 1964

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The Bookshelf

Red Master Spy And Defender

By JOHN BARKHAM

**STRANGERS ON A BRIDGE:
THE CASE OF COLONEL
ABEL.** By James B. Dono-
van. Atheneum Publishers.
432 pp. \$6.95.

The bridge: the Glienicke
Bridge in Berlin, linking West
with East Germany.

The time: ear-
ly morning of
Feb. 10, 1962.

Counsel The strangers:
For the Soviet master
Unpopular spy Rudolf Abel,
arrested in the
United States;

U-2 pilot Gary Powers, ar-
rested in the Soviet Union;
and New York attorney James
B. Donovan, who guided and
supervised their exchange.

For James Donovan, a pub-
lic-spirited New York attorney,
it represented the last agoniz-
ing link in a chain of events
which added years to his life—
and luster to his reputation.
He has written this absorbing
account of his part in the
Rudolf Abel affair, and it turns
out to be a very good book
indeed.

Donovan is, in fact, a rather
unusual lawyer. He will un-
dertake unpopular cases when
many of his colleagues won't,
because he genuinely believes
that every accused person
under our system of law has
the right to the best defense
he can afford. You may recall
that he performed a similarly
delicate, and equally unpopu-
lar, service in arranging with
Castro to release the prisoners
captured in the Bay of Pigs
debacle.

Abel Operated 9 Years

What manner of man, then,
is this New York Irishman
with the Harvard law degree?
He doesn't tell you in so many
words, but it comes through
clearly enough in his narrative
of the Abel affair. Rudolf Abel

was for nine years head of the
Soviet espionage apparatus in
the United States. He operated
out of an artist's studio in
Brooklyn—a master spy in the
true sense of the word, who
might never have been caught
had he not been betrayed by a
subordinate. The U.S. knew it
had caught a big fish, and de-
cided to give Abel the sort of
trial that would demonstrate
the fairness of the American
judicial process.

James Donovan was the
counsel nominated to under-
take Abel's defense, and he
performed his assignment with
exemplary skill. What emerges
unmistakably from the book is
the mutual respect that the
two men felt for each other.
Each was a strong character,
utterly devoted to his country,
and each was able to recognize
similar qualities in the other.

Mutual Respect

Abel never betrayed his
country, nor did Donovan ever
promise more than he could
perform. It was he who urged
the court not to impose the
death sentence, as it might
well have done, if only because
Abel could some day be ex-
changed for an American
agent who might fall into Rus-
sian hands.

This is precisely what later
happened, and when the ex-
change for Gary Powers (plus
two other young Americans)
became possible, it was Dono-
van who functioned as go-
between. The Abel trial is ex-
citing reading in its own right,
and the intricate political ma-
neuvering which preceded the
meeting on the bridge might
have come straight out of an
Eric Ambler thriller.

Abel was grateful to his
lawyer, and subsequently dem-
onstrated his thanks in a
graceful gesture recorded in
these pages. At least one man
in the Soviet Union today
knows what American justice
means, thanks in great part
to James B. Donovan.

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